

**Staff Report- May 8, 2012**  
**The Commons II-120 McMechen Street**  
**Baltimore City Historic District- Bolton Hill**

Plan: Concept Hearing

Staff Presenter: Stacy Montgomery

Applicant: Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA)

Architect: Hord Coplan Macht, Inc.

**Background**

The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) proposes to construct a new building at the northwest edge of the campus. This is the first Concept Hearing for this project. The Commons II would accommodate the school's growing freshman class and provide activity space as well. A significant portion of the MICA Campus is located within the Bolton Hill Historic District. The Commons, a residence hall constructed in the early 1990s, is currently located at the southern edge of the property by McMechen Street. The Commons II will have a McMechen Street Address, but will be located at the north end of the lot along North Avenue, near Park Avenue and Brevard Street.

CHAP and Planning Department Staff and members of the Bolton Hill Architectural Review Committee have held several fruitful meetings with representatives from MICA and Hord Coplan Macht to discuss the proposed plans and the project goals. A site visit was conducted by this group on April 19, 2012.

This project is being reviewed in accordance with Preservation Guidelines Chapter 11 Design Guidelines for New Construction. Staff also applied Standards #9 and #10. The site is located near the northeast corner of the Bolton Hill historic district.

**Plan**

The plan is to construct a five-story, 62-unit, stand-alone, L-shaped, residential building at the northwest corner of the MICA campus in the Bolton Hill Historic District. The new construction will occur on an existing parking lot. The ground floor will have a combination of student housing and amenities, including a black box theater, a lecture hall, artist studios, and a lobby.

**Analysis**

The building will be located at the north end of the large lot, along North Avenue, near Park Avenue and Brevard Street. The building address is on McMechen Street, along with the existing Commons residence halls that are already standing. Easements, existing buildings, and parking constraints dictate where on the lot this new construction can occur. No existing buildings will be demolished to accommodate the new construction.

Building orientation in Bolton Hill has always been toward the main street to which a building fronts. Historically, rowhouses on this lot would have faced onto North Avenue; however, demolition during Urban Renewal and subsequent new construction did not renew the historic relationship to the North Avenue street front. More recent new construction further east on North Avenue has started to change this pattern in that area. Plans show the main entrance to the building on the east elevation, which faces into the larger residence hall complex and in the direction of McMechen Street. The plans address North Avenue as a secondary elevation.

The building is five stories tall with a flat roof. The proposed height is only one to two stories taller than many residential buildings in Bolton Hill and similar in height to many apartment buildings within the district. Since the building sits on North Avenue, the height is in keeping with many of the buildings along this thoroughfare. The proposed building would also be in keeping with the height of the existing Commons buildings on the same lot, but smaller in overall scale and lot coverage.

The building is L-shaped, with the longest frontage is along North Avenue. The L forms a courtyard along the south elevation. Large elevations are broken up by a series of projecting and recessed bays on the north elevation, projecting walls and corners on the east elevation over the entry, and a projecting glass staircase on the south elevation.

The materials used vary by elevation and include masonry (brick), fiber cement panels, Trespa wood paneling, and glass. These materials are compatible with materials found throughout the Bolton Hill Historic District.

### **East and South Elevations**

The main entry to the building will be at the south end of the east elevation, with secondary entries along the south elevation. Large, glass and aluminum storefront windows will span the east elevation and southeast corner of the building. Steel columns will support the projecting corner over the entrance. The fenestration pattern will be fairly regular with 3-pane aluminum windows. Windows on a large projecting section of the east elevation, and windows facing the southwest courtyard will be separated by Trespa wood panels. The upper stories will be clad in fiber cement panels.

### **South and West Elevations - Courtyard**

Aluminum overhead doors will face into the courtyard on the first stories of south and west elevations. The proposed siding for these elevations will be clad in fiber cement board. Trespa wood panels will surround the openings along the courtyard. The fenestration pattern will be a combination of single and paired 3-pane aluminum windows with Trespa wood panels. A glass-enclosed staircase will project from the south elevation and will be framed with Trespa wood panels.

### **North Elevation**

The north elevation, and the north corner of the west elevation, will be masonry construction. An aluminum storefront window will be located at the east corner of the north elevation, extending to the center of the north elevation. The glass at the corner will be pulled back from the masonry. The four upper stories will feature regularly spaced fenestration that is either recessed or projecting from the masonry façade. These projections and recessed window bays will be clad in fiber cement paneling. The fenestration will be 3-pane aluminum windows. The MICA logo will be located at the northeast corner of the building. The masonry and fenestration pattern will wrap the northwest corner of the building, where a service entry will be located.

### **Neighborhood Comments**

The Bolton Hill Architectural Review Committee has reviewed the plans as proposed and will present comments at the hearing.

### **Staff Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the applicant be given conceptual approval for the height, scale, massing, and materials, as they meet CHAP Guidelines for New Construction 11.1 Guiding Principles for New Design, 11.2 Site Design, 11.3 Scale and Form, 11.4 Building Features, 11.5 Materials and Detailing, and Standards #9 and #10.

Staff recommends that project should return for a full commission review of the elevations and detailing on the North Avenue elevation, as the proposed plans for this elevation do not currently meet the following CHAP Guidelines:

a. 11.2 Site Design

- i. Primary buildings should have a similar orientation and relationship to the street as existing buildings. Primary entrances and facades should be located, oriented, and sequenced to be consistent with the patterns of entrances and facades in the neighborhood.”
- ii. “New construction at corners or abutting public spaces requires special consideration in the design of entrances and multiple, publically visible facades”

b. 11.4 Building Features

- i. “Design building entrances to enhance the connection between the street and the building interior;”
- ii. “Respect the existing pattern of building entrances when locating new entrances.”



## Site Plan



## View Facing North





**View Facing South**



**View Facing East**





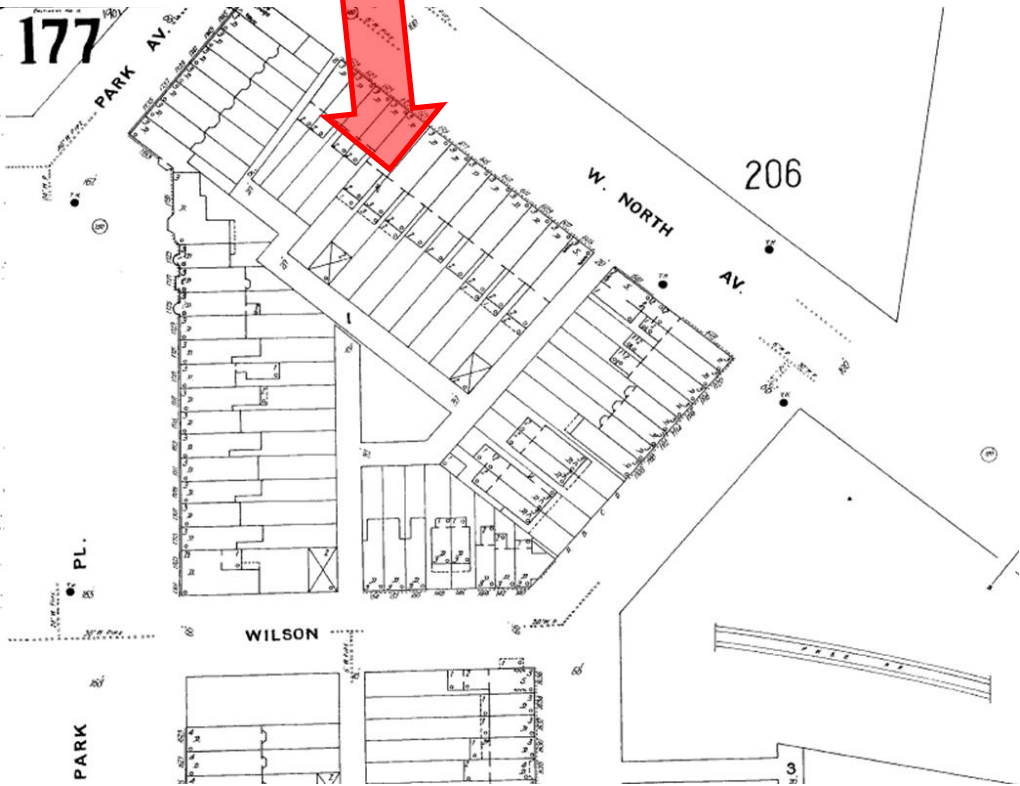
**View Facing West**



**Street View from North Avenue**



1901-1902 Sanborn Map



1953 Sanborn Map

